SYNOPSIS

Eleven directors tell the story of the high school dropout crisis in Latin America in an anthology of narrative and documentary film as beautifully diverse and complex as the region. Travel to seven different countries and explore the underlying reasons why nearly one out of every two students never makes it to graduation day.

DIRECTORS

Creative Director: Gael García Bernal

Gael Garcia Bernal began his professional career as a child actor. He studied in London at the Central School for Speech and Drama. He made his big screen debut in Amores Perros, which was directed by Alejandro Gonzalez Iñarritu and nominated for an Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film in 2000. His next film Y tu mamá también, directed by Alfonso Cuarón and co-starring his friend Diego Luna, was an international success. Gael made his debut as a director with Deficit, an independent film shot in Mexico. In 2005 he founded the production company Canana with Diego Luna and Pablo Cruz.

Carlos Gaviria has extensive experience in the film industry and has often explored social development themes in his work. As a consultant for UNICEF in Colombia, Gaviria created and directed the award-winning documentaries 500 segundos: Los niños de las Américas (500 Seconds: The Children of the Americas), which was shown on over 250 television stations around the world. He has also been director of photography in over 20 films and documentaries, both in the US and Latin America. In 2010, Gaviria finished writing, directing and editing his debut film Retratos en un mar de mentiras (Potraits in a Sea of Lies), which went on to receive more than 25 international awards becoming the most award-winning Colombian film.

In The Empty Classroom, Gaviria explores the links between the dropout crisis and violence. His short film Good Intentions tells the story of two young people on the road to recovery after becoming the victims of violence. Good Intentions shows the impact violence can have on future generations.

Short Film: Good Intentions
Director: Carlos Gaviria, Colombia
Brothers Daniel and Diego Vega burst onto the film scene with the successful debut of their first film, Octubre, which they wrote and produced. It premiered as an Official Selection, Un Certain Regard, at the 2010 Cannes Film Festival and won the Jury Prize. Octubre was invited to more than 100 festivals, won over 20 awards and was screened in commercial theaters around the world. The second feature of the Peruvian brothers, El Mudo, is a co-production between Peru, France and Mexico, and was invited to participate in the L'Atelier program of the Cannes Film Festival in 2011. This film was shown at the Locarno Film Festival in Switzerland where it took the prize for Best Actor. The Vega brothers won the award for Best Director at BAFICI and El Mudo continues to be recognized by film festivals all over the world.

Adolescence is full of important decisions that can shape your future. In the short Alondra, the Vega brothers follow a teenager from Lima who wonders how she will graduate from high school. Are high schools prepared to engage twenty-first century students?

Eryk Rocha was born in Brasilia and has lived in several Spanish-speaking countries, such as Cuba where he studied film. Since the successful debut of his first feature-length film, Rocha que voa (Stones in the Sky, 2002), his movies have been screened at film festivals all over the world. In 2004, his short film Quimera competed at Cannes (2004) and Sundance (2006) and won Best Short Film at the Montevideo International Festival (2005) and the Belen Festival (2004). His documentary film Pachamama was shown at 15 international festivals and won Best Documentary Film at Cineport Festival in 2009. His first work of fiction, Transeunte, has won more than 20 awards at national and international film festivals. Rocha's latest film, Jards, premiered at the Festival of Rio de Janeiro 2012 where he won the award for Best Director. In 2014, Rocha participated as a judge at the International Festival of Environmental Film and Video in Brazil.

In The Empty Classroom, Rocha takes a look at how to identify students at risk of dropping out of school in Latin America. His film Igor is based on the real life story of a teenager with lots of energy and potential who lacks the motivation to stay in school. This true story reflects the current situation of many students who are at risk of dropping out of school.
Since the successful debut of her first feature length film, Diario de uma busca (Diaries, Letters, Revolutions), Flavia Castro has won 14 national and international film awards. She works with directors in France and Brazil as a screenwriter. She is currently working on her next feature film, Joana, and writing the adapted screenplay of the novel “Distant Star” by Roberto Bolaño. She lives in Rio de Janeiro.

In her short film Mathematics, the Brazilian director explores the lack of interest in school that is preventing students from graduating. While it is true that socioeconomic barriers still keep some students from completing high school in Latin America, this does not tell the full story. In most countries, the decision whether to stay in school has become the greatest challenge to educating future generations.

Lucrecia Martel was born in Salta, a province in northern Argentina, and studied Animation at the Experimental Center of Buenos Aires. From 1986 to 1991 she studied Communication Sciences at the University of Buenos Aires and attended the Filmmaking Center of the National Institute of Cinematography. Since 2001, Martel has taught workshops for writers and directors in Mexico, Spain, Costa Rica, Chile, Ecuador, Brazil, Venezuela and Colombia. Her second feature film, produced by Pedro Almodóvar, La niña santa (The Holy Girl), was nominated for the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival. Her third film, La mujer sin cabeza (The Headless Woman), competed at the Cannes Film Festival in 2008; a festival where she also participated as a judge in 2006.

It is said that education is the great equalizer able to close gaps and open opportunities. But what happens when schools themselves reflect the divisions and discrimination within a community in conflict? In Martel’s short Leagues, the Argentine filmmaker explores the issue of school exclusion in indigenous communities.
Since the success of her first feature film, Cinco días sin Nora, Mariana Chenillo has won over 20 national and international awards at film festivals the world over, including the award for Best Director at the 31st Moscow International Film Festival and the award for Best Feature at the 16th Biarritz Festival of Latin American Cinema. Her most recent film, Paraiso (Paradise) was screened at the 2013 Toronto Film Festival, as well as at other prestigious film festivals including San Sebastian, Morelia and Rio de Janeiro, and was commercially released in 2014. Prior to directing these films, Mariana Chenillo directed and produced feature films, short films, television shows, and commercials alongside renowned directors.

Students with disabilities face physical, social, and cultural barriers to accessing education. It is estimated that only 20% to 30% of children and youth with disabilities in Latin America attend school. In her short Hugo, Chenillo’s protagonist is just like any other high school student; he goes to class and studies so that he can graduate. The only difference: he is a deaf student in a hearing world. Hugo is a typical teenager. He just faces not-so-typical challenges to finishing high school.

Renowned film director Nicolas Pereda is known for films such as his hybrid documentary Verano de Goliat (Summer of Goliath). Pereda has a Master of Arts in Film from the University of York in Canada and has directed films and videos for several interdisciplinary works, operas and dance pieces that have been made in Mexico and Europe. His first feature, ¿Dónde están sus historias? (Where are their stories?), was screened at festivals worldwide and won the Discovery Award at the Latin American Cinema Encounters of Toulouse. Pereda’s films have been screened at some of the most prestigious film festivals in the world including Cannes, Venice, Rotterdam, Oberhausen, Vienna and Edinburgh.

For students who drop out of school, the future can be as uncertain and confusing as snow on television. The immediate costs and challenges might prevent them from seeing the long-term benefits of a quality education. But if the education system is failing, why even bother going to school? Pereda asks in his short film Written Off for The Empty Classroom, if the cost to staying in school is worth it.
El Asaltante (The Mugger), the successful debut film of Argentine writer and director Pablo Fendrik, brought him to the 46th Critics' Week at the Cannes Film Festival. La Sangre Brota (Blood Appears), his second film, premiered in competition at the 47th Critics' Week at the Cannes Film Festival. The films won several national and international awards such as the 2008 Cannes Young Critics Award for La Sangre Brota, the award for best artistic contribution at the 2007 Havana Film Festival, as well as the Silver Condor, South and Clarin Awards for best debut film for El Asaltante. Almost immediately after the successive releases of the El Asaltante and La Sangre Brota, Fendrik began working on El Ardor which premiered at the 2014 Cannes Film Festival.

Fendrik directed Piñalito, a short filmed in Misiones, Argentina about the obstacles to accessing education in rural areas. The protagonist Pedro dreams of escaping the backbreaking work on his family’s tobacco farm. He would like to study but his family wants him to work. Will he end up going to school?

Uruguayan filmmaker Pablo Stoll Ward, with Juan Pablo Rebella, wrote and directed 25 Watts (2001) and Whisky (2004). Both received several international awards and were released commercially in over 25 countries. In 2009 he shot Hiroshima, his first solo project, which was selected for several festivals around the world. His film 3 was released in the Directors’ Fortnight at the Cannes Film Festival in 2012. Stoll was the producer of La Perrera (2004), Acne (2009), Gigante (2010) and Tanta Agua (2013). He has also directed several music clips and short documentaries for television. He currently teaches film production in the National School of Fine Arts at the University of the Republic of Uruguay.

In his short film More or Less produced for The Empty Classroom, Stoll asks what kind of future awaits young people who drop out of high school, and what happens when they want to go back to school. In his short, two teenagers are highly motivated to pursue their dreams, but unmotivated to stay in school. They soon discover that education is not an obstacle in the way, but rather the key to success in life. But will it be too late to go back?
The Tiniest Place, Tatiana Huezo’s first feature documentary filmed in El Salvador, was critically acclaimed and received several prestigious international awards. Since graduating from the renowned Film Training Center of Mexico, Tatiana has worked in various positions in the area of directing and producing documentaries as a cinematographer, writer, and researcher. She is currently directing the documentary Tempestad, after completing the short documentary Ausencias.

In her short film See No Evil, Hear No Evil, Speak No Evil, the Mexican-Salvadoran filmmaker investigates how violence affects the school dropout crisis. This film explores the fear that forces many young people living in high-risk areas of the city of San Salvador to abandon their studies. Education can be a powerful tool to prevent violence. The tragic irony is that in some places, even the schools are not safe.

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